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EXCISE

January 6, 1976

Honorable J. Glenn Beall, Jr.
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Beall:

Thank you for your letter of December 5 with which you forwarded the concerns of [redacted] about U.S.-PLO contacts and the 1967 attack on the U.S.S. Liberty by Israeli forces. (b)(6)

The United States fully appreciates that the legitimate interests of the Palestinians must be met if a Middle East peace is to be achieved and to prove durable. We believe, however, that the manner in which Palestinian interests are met is properly the subject for negotiation between the Arab and Israeli parties to the conflict. As you know, the United States has been engaged ever since the October 1973 Middle East war in intensive efforts to promote progress toward an Arab-Israeli peace settlement, and several significant and constructive agreements between the parties to the dispute have been achieved under U.S. auspices. As the President has made clear, these U.S. efforts will continue.

Though the Arab states, as well as a number of other nations, have recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people, the United States, as well as a number of other nations, have not done so. The chief reasons we have not done so are that the PLO, unlike the Arab states, has not recognized the right of Israel to exist, nor has it accepted Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 which are the agreed bases of Middle East peace negotiations. Moreover, the PLO espouses the use of terror to achieve political goals and this is a position we can hardly be expected to support.

Concerning the attack on the USS Liberty during the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, the Government of Israel

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informed us of the attack by its air and sea forces on the USS Liberty shortly after the attack took place on June 8. We expressed in strongest terms our concern over this act, on the grounds that the Liberty was on a peaceful mission in international waters, and that there was ample opportunity for the attacking forces to identify the ship as American. The Israeli Government in turn expressed regret for what it described as a tragic accident, and offered to make amends for the loss of life and damage which had occurred. On April 28, 1969 the U.S. Government received $3,566,457 from the Israeli Government. At the time of the incident, a Navy court of inquiry made a thorough study of what had happened. The results of the investigation were made public through a report issued by the Department of Defense.

Please call on me if I can be of further assistance to you.

Sincerely,

Robert J. McCloskey
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Enclosure:
Correspondence returned

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